

4

War, Revolt and the Overthrow of the Monarchy 1792–3

POINTS TO CONSIDER

As you read in Chapter 3, the government undertook an ambitious reform programme to modernise France. This led to increased tensions among those opposed to these policies. Many *émigrés* left France, and from exile became active opponents of the government. A number of politicians of widely differing views urged war as a means of dealing with these opponents. The decision to go to war had momentous consequences for both France and Europe. These are examined in three themes:

- The outbreak of war
- The overthrow of the monarchy
- The Republic at war 1792–3

Key dates

1791	August 27	Declaration of Pillnitz
1792	April 20	War declared on Austria
	June 13	Prussia declared war on France
	August 10	Overthrow of the monarchy
	August 19	Prussian forces entered northern France
	August 20	Capture of Longwy
	September 2–6	September Massacres
	September 22	Proclamation of the Republic
	November 6	Battle of Jemappes
	November 19	Decree of Fraternity
1793	January 21	Execution of Louis XVI
	February 1	War declared on Great Britain and the Dutch Republic
	March 11	Revolt in the Vendée
	October 16	Battle of Wattignies

1 | The Outbreak of War

Despite mistrust of the King, it seemed likely that the Constitution of 1791 would survive. What prevented this was the outbreak of war with Austria in April 1792. This event had more decisive and far-reaching results than any other in the whole of the Revolution. Almost everything that happened in France from that time was caused, or was affected, by this decision. The war finally destroyed the consensus of 1789. It led directly to the fall of the monarchy, to civil war and to the Terror.

Foreign reaction to the Revolution

The **Great Powers** had shown no inclination to intervene during the first two years of the French Revolution. Leopold II, ruler of the **Habsburg Empire**, approved of many of the liberal reforms in the Revolution and did not want a return to absolutism in France. He, like other sovereigns, was pleased at the collapse of French power and no longer regarded France as a serious rival. In any case, Russia, Austria and Prussia were pre-occupied elsewhere. From 1787, Russia and Austria were at war with the Ottoman Empire. Leopold abandoned the fight in July 1790 to concentrate on the Austrian Netherlands (the area between Holland and France which 40 years later became Belgium), where there was a revolt. He crushed this in the winter of 1790 and then turned his attention to Poland, where Russia and Prussia were seeking to gain territory. All three powers were essentially more interested in trying to secure a partition of Poland to their own advantage, than in what was going on in France.

Declaration of Pillnitz

After the flight to Varennes (see page 65), the Austrians felt they had to make some gesture in support of Louis. On 27 August 1791, they issued the Declaration of Pillnitz in association with Prussia. This stated that:

- both countries regarded the present situation of the French King of common interest to all other European rulers
- they hoped to restore the powers of the French crown
- force would be used if necessary to bring about this restoration.

The Declaration was significant because it appeared to be a threat to interfere in French internal affairs. Enemies of the King considered that the declaration justified their opposition to, and mistrust of, the monarchy. In reality however, it was no threat at all since the Austrians knew that the other powers, such as Britain, would not join them. This meant that the Declaration was unlikely to lead to any action. In France the Declaration did not create much of a stir. The Assembly did not debate it and most newspapers ignored it. When the Constitution was passed in September, Leopold gave it a warm welcome, so the possibility of Austrian intervention was even more remote.

Key question
Why did France go to war in April 1792?

Great Powers

Countries that were more powerful than others on the basis of their military, economic and territorial strength – the major ones were Austria, France, Prussia, Russia and Great Britain

Habsburg Empire

Territory that roughly corresponds to modern-day Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The empire also considered itself to be the leading German state.

Rulers of Austria and Prussia issue a joint declaration of support for Louis XVI known as the Declaration of Pillnitz: 27 August 1791

Key terms

Key date

Key question
Why did Brissot believe war to be in France's best interest?

Support for war

In France, several people, for very different reasons, came to believe that war was either in their own best interests or in those of France. Marie Antoinette ('the only man in the family', Mirabeau called her) wrote to her brother, the Emperor Leopold II, in September 1791: 'Conciliation is out of the question now. Armed force has destroyed everything and only armed force can put things right'. She hoped for a war in which France would be defeated, enabling Louis to recover his old powers. The King shared her view that France would be defeated. 'The physical condition and morale of France', he wrote, 'is such that it will be unable to sustain even half a campaign.' The deputies were not convinced. There were widespread rumours that the country's foreign policy was being run by an '**Austrian Committee**', headed by Marie Antoinette, and that secret agents were being sent to Koblenz (the headquarters of the *émigrés*) and Vienna to plot counter-revolution. These rumours were well founded.

Army commanders such as Lafayette and Dumouriez also wanted war. Lafayette, the first commander of the National Guard, had brought the King from Versailles to Paris during the October Days and was responsible for the 'massacre' of the Champ de Mars (see page 67). He had become disillusioned by the failure of the Revolution to produce political stability and wanted the authority of the King to be strengthened. This could be done by waging a short, successful war against Austria, which he believed would increase his prestige as a general. It would also enable him to dictate his own terms to both the King and the Assembly.

The desire for war resulted in the co-operation of Lafayette and his followers with the **Brissotins**, who also wanted war. The Brissotins were not a party, but a group of deputies, led by Jacques Brissot, who merged with the Girondins to create a much more powerful group. Brissot was one of the first to support demands for a republic. After the flight to Varennes he argued for the abolition of the monarchy and the trial of Louis XVI. He saw that the King had not really accepted the Constitution and that the Court was plotting against the Revolution and seeking the armed intervention of the European powers. Brissot believed that war would force the King to reveal his true sympathies – either being for or against the Revolution. He also argued that it would expose any traitors who were opposed to the Revolution.

There were about 130 Girondins in the 745-member Legislative Assembly, so to obtain a majority they needed the support both of Lafayette and his followers and of the unorganised centre. Brissot obtained this by playing on their hopes and fears by waging a campaign calling for war, which he began in October 1791. The main points in his case for war were:

- a successful conflict would rouse enthusiasm for the Revolution and show the permanence of the new regime
- a war would allow France to extend its revolutionary ideals abroad

Key terms
'Austrian Committee'
A group of influential politicians and close confidants who gathered around Marie Antoinette, the daughter of the Austrian Empress Maria Theresa. They kept in close secret contact with Vienna, the capital of the Austrian/Habsburg Empire.

Brissotins
A group of deputies who supported Jacques Brissot and later merged with the Girondins.

Profile: Marquis de Lafayette 1757–1834

- 1757 – Born at Chavaniac on 6 September into an ancient noble family
- 1774 – Married the daughter of the Duc d'Ayen
- 1777 – Used part of his enormous fortune to fit out a ship and set sail for America
 - Distinguished service in the cause of liberty made him a hero in France and opened up his mind to the need for reform in his homeland
- 1787 – Member of the Assembly of Notables, called for the summoning of the Estates-General, was closely connected with the reform movement
- 1789 – Representative of the nobility to the Estates-General.
 - Appointed commander of the new Parisian National Guard following the storming of the Bastille. During the October Days his troops saved the royal family from a hostile crowd who attacked Versailles. He escorted them to Paris where they effectively became captives of the Revolution
- 1790 – Occupied a pivotal role in the *Fête de la Fédération* to celebrate the first anniversary of the Revolution. Within weeks the champion of liberty appeared to be supporting repression, when an army mutiny was suppressed
- 1791 – The National Guard under Lafayette's command shoot demonstrators during the Champ de Mars massacre. This appeared to confirm the popular belief that he was hostile towards ordinary people. His fall from power was rapid
- 1792 – At the outbreak of war he was appointed commander of the Army of the Centre
 - June – Left his post during the *journées* to try and organise the Legislative Assembly against the Jacobin
 - August 19 – After the overthrow of Louis he tried to turn his army against Paris, failed and defected to the Prussians
- 1797 – Imprisoned by the allies
- 1799 – Returned to France under Napoleon and retired to farm his estates



Marriage into the great Noailles family gave Lafayette good connections into the circle of courtiers around the young Louis XVI. During the early years of the Revolution he allied himself with the Revolutionary bourgeoisie and became one of the most powerful men in France. Over-ambition proved to be his undoing and his attempts to seize power failed.

- French armies would have the active support of their enemy's own repressed subjects
- the international situation was favourable as the European powers were unlikely to unite against France – Russia was preoccupied with Poland, and Britain would not join in unless its home security or empire was directly threatened.

Key issue

Why did Robespierre oppose the call for war?

Opposition to war

Most deputies were won over by these arguments but some politicians outside the Assembly were not. Robespierre expressed his attitude to the war in these terms:

You propose to give supreme power to those who most want your ruin. The only way to save the State and to safeguard freedom is to wage war in the right way, on our enemies at home, instead of marching under their orders against their allies across the frontiers.

He believed that the real threat came from soldiers like Lafayette, who were still popular enough to mislead the public. Robespierre believed that the aim of the European powers was to intimidate France, not to invade her. War would be more difficult than Brissot expected, because foreigners would not rise up in support of French invaders. Robespierre memorably observed: 'No one loves armed missionaries.' As a result of his opposition to the war, Robespierre became an isolated and unpopular figure, who was convinced that his opponents were plotting to betray the Revolution. His relations with Brissot were poisoned by bitter personal quarrels and mutual suspicion.

Key issue

Why were the foreign powers confident of victory in any war against France?

The declaration of war

The Girondins were pressing hard for war but it is doubtful whether they would have gained the support of the majority of deputies without the bungling of Austria and Prussia. On 7 February 1792 Austria and Prussia became allies and thought they could intimidate the French by threatening war. They had great confidence in their own armies: in 1789 a small Prussian army had conquered the **United Provinces** in under a month and in 1790 a small Austrian army occupied Belgium in under two weeks. They believed France to be weak from internal division, while mutinies in the army and the loss of so many officers who had fled the country would undermine her ability to defend herself effectively. Added to this was the bankrupt nature of French finances, which would limit the purchase of munitions. It was anticipated that France would have neither the will nor the ability to resist Austrian pressure.

Austrian threats and Girondin attacks on the 'Austrian Committee' at Court forced the King to dismiss his Feuillant ministers in March 1792 and to appoint a more radical government, including some Girondins. This was a decisive change. The old ministers had carried out the wishes of the King: the new ones obeyed the Assembly. Both the Assembly and the government now wanted war, especially the new Foreign Minister,

Key term

United Provinces

Present-day Holland ruled at the time by the House of Orange.

General Dumouriez. He hated Austria but had aims similar to those of Lafayette: a short successful war would increase his own personal power and prestige along with that of the Crown.

In Austria, the cautious Leopold had died on 1 March and had been replaced by the young and impetuous Francis II. When rumours reached Austria that Marie Antoinette was to be put on trial, it decided reluctantly on war. But it was the French who actually declared war, on 20 April 1792. Only seven deputies voted against it. The French hoped to fight solely against Austria but Prussia declared war on France a month later and took the lead in the campaign under its Commander-in-Chief the Duke of Brunswick. For very different reasons, influential groups in the Assembly and supporters of Louis XVI decided that war would serve their interests best. They hoped for a short decisive war – this did not happen. The resulting conflict – known as the **Revolutionary War** – would:

- last 10 years until the Treaty of Amiens 1802
- result in the loss of 1.4 million French people
- dramatically alter the whole direction of the Revolution.

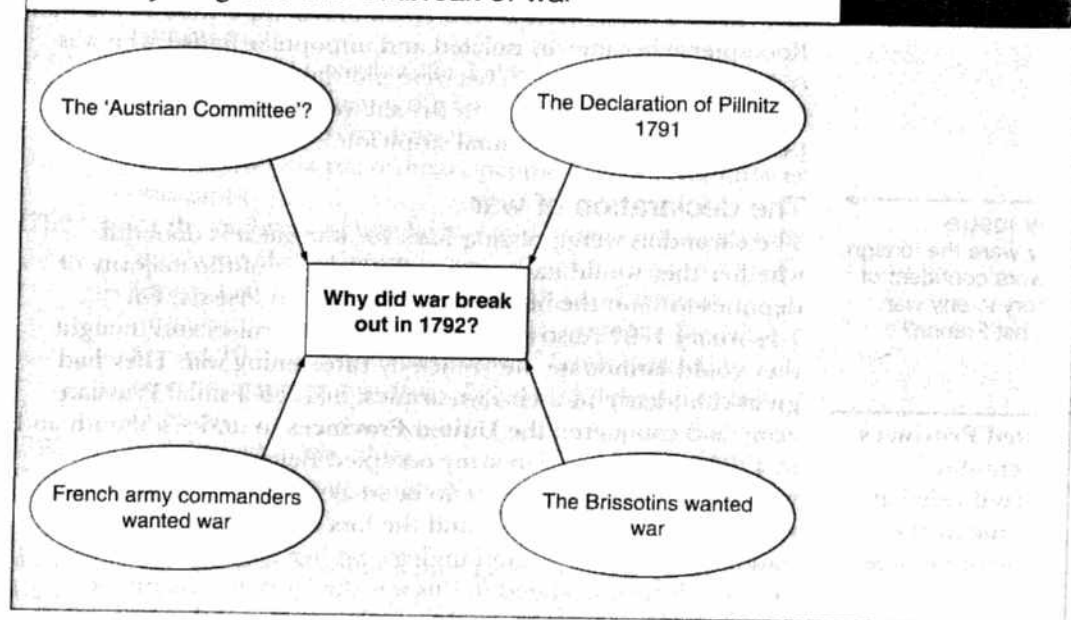
France declares war on Austria: 20 April 1792

Key date

Revolutionary War
Fought by France against other European powers between 1792 and 1802.

Key term

Summary diagram: The outbreak of war



2 | The Overthrow of the Monarchy

This section will consider the events that immediately preceded the overthrow of Louis XVI. Having taken France into war the early military engagements showed how badly prepared the French army was. Military defeat and the desertion of many commanders to the enemy created great tension and fear in Paris

Key question
How well prepared was France for the war in 1792?

Key terms

Fédérés

Mainly national guardsmen sent from the provinces to display national unity during the *Fête de la Fédération* that commemorated the fall of the Bastille.

Paris Sections

Paris was divided into 48 sections to replace the 60 electoral districts of 1789 – the section became the power base of the *sans-culottes*.

Key date

Key term

Key question

Why did Louis' actions lead to demands for greater democracy?

that the capital would be captured. The royal family and Louis were suspected of being less than fully committed to gaining a French victory, and some of Louis' actions were seen as hostile to the Revolution. In this climate the King's political opponents became increasingly determined to overthrow the monarchy.

The military crisis

When war was declared, the French army was far from ready. It was badly depleted. Of its 12,000 officers, half had emigrated. There were 150,000 men under arms in 1791 comprising both regular and newly recruited volunteers. However, a combination of desertion and revolutionary propaganda in the many new newspapers and magazines destroyed the discipline of the regular army, while the volunteers were poorly trained and equipped.

When French forces advanced into the Austrian Netherlands (Belgium) on 20 April 1792 they were faced with determined opposition. The army panicked and retreated headlong to Lille, where they murdered their commander. Whole units deserted. By the end of May all three field-commanders were advising that peace should be made immediately. The allies counter-attacked and invaded northern France. Treason and traitors were blamed for French defeats and with some justification: Marie Antoinette had sent details of French military plans to the Austrians.

Royal vetoes

The government also had other problems to cope with, such as opposition from refractory priests and counter-revolutionaries who wanted to restore the authority of the Catholic Church and the monarchy. The Girondins had to satisfy demands for action against 'traitors'. On 27 May, the Assembly passed a law for the deportation of refractory priests. Another law disbanded the King's Guard and a third set up a camp for 20,000 National Guards (they were known as *fédérés* because their arrival was to coincide with the *Fête de la Fédération* on 14 July) from the provinces. They were to protect Paris from invasion and the government from a *coup* by the generals, especially Lafayette.

Louis refused to approve these laws. When Roland, the Girondin Minister of the Interior, protested, Louis dismissed him and other Girondin ministers on 13 June. Dumouriez resigned soon afterwards. On 19 June Louis vetoed the laws on refractory priests and the *fédéré* camp. There was an expectation of a military *coup* in support of the King.

The rise of the *sans-culottes*

Leaders of the **Paris Sections** responded to these events by holding an armed demonstration on 20 June, the anniversary of the Tennis Court Oath and of the flight to Varennes. Their leaders came from the Cordeliers Club. The Jacobins did not get involved, as they had done at the time of the Champ de Mars petition. About 8000 demonstrators, many of them National Guards, poured into the Tuileries. One participant described

seeing Louis '... wearing the *bonnet rouge* on his head and drinking from a bottle, to the health of the nation'. Louis behaved with great dignity. He was not intimidated and his calmness may have saved his life. This *journée* did not achieve its desired end: the King did not withdraw his veto or recall the Girondin ministers. However, it did show very clearly the weakness of the King and the Assembly and the growing power of the Sections.

The Assembly soon took steps which recognised the growing importance of the *sans-culottes* but which also increased the likelihood of a rising. On 11 July it declared a state of emergency by issuing a decree '*la patrie en danger*', which called on every Frenchman to fight. This tilted the balance of power in favour of those who called for greater democracy. How could you ask a man to fight and not give him a vote? The Sections, whose assemblies were allowed to meet in permanent session, and *fédérés* demanded the admission of 'passive citizens' into the sectional assemblies and National Guard. These requests were granted by the end of the month. The bourgeois middle-class control of 1789 had begun to give way to the popular democracy of the *sans-culottes*.

Tension in Paris

Tension in Paris was increased by the arrival of *fédérés* from the provinces in late July 1793, and by the publication of the Brunswick Manifesto.

The *fédérés*

The *fédérés* were militant revolutionaries and republicans, unlike the Paris National Guard, whose officers were conservative or royalist. Their patriotism was expressed in the war song of the Rhine army, composed in Strasbourg by Rouget de l'Isle. It acquired its name '*La Marseillaise*' as it was sung by the *fédérés* of Marseille on their march to the capital. In July their total number in Paris was never above 5000 but they were a powerful pressure group in the radical sections, calling for the removal of the King.

The situation in Paris was deteriorating rapidly and extremists were becoming much more active in the political life of the capital. With a new insurrection being prepared by radicals and *fédérés* from the middle of July, the Girondins changed their attitude of opposition to the King and tried to prevent a rising. They were alarmed that events were getting out of their control. Girondin leaders warned the King that there was likely to be a more violent uprising than that of 20 June and that it was very likely that he would be deposed. They offered to do all they could to prevent such an uprising, if he would recall the ministers dismissed on 13 June. Louis rejected their offer.

The Jacobin leader, Robespierre, was co-operating with the central committee of the *fédérés* and on 29 July, in a speech to the Jacobin Club, he put forward his proposals:

- Abandonment of the Constitution of 1791.
- The overthrow of the monarchy.

Key question

How did the *fédérés* and the Brunswick manifesto lead to the removal of the King?

Bonnet rouge

The red cap popularly known as the cap of liberty, which became an important symbol of the Revolution.

La patrie en danger

'The fatherland is in danger' became a rallying cry to ordinary people to help save the country.

La Marseillaise

The rousing song composed by Rouget de l'Isle in 1792 and adopted as the anthem of the Republic on 14 July 1795.

Key terms

Universal male suffrage

A vote for every man over a certain age.

Purge

Forced removal of political opponents.

- The establishment of a National Convention, elected by **universal male suffrage** to replace the Legislative Assembly.
- A **purge** of the departmental authorities, many of which were royalist.

Until this date Robespierre had warned the *fédérés* and the Sections against hasty action, as this might lead to a backlash in the King's favour. Now he felt the moment had come to strike. Petitions were pouring in from the *fédérés*, the clubs and provinces for the removal of the King.

The Brunswick manifesto

To add to the worsening tension the Brunswick Manifesto, issued by the commander-in-chief of the Austro-Prussian armies, was published in Paris on 1 August. Its main terms were:

- to ensure the welfare of France, and not to conquer any French territory
- to restore the liberty of Louis XVI and his family
- that the city of Paris set Louis free without delay, and make it responsible for the safety of the royal family
- if the Tuileries palace was attacked and the royal family harmed then the joint Austrian-Prussian army would inflict 'an exemplary vengeance' on the city and its citizens.

The Manifesto was intended to help the King but it had the opposite effect. Frenchmen were infuriated by what they considered to be foreign intervention in their affairs. Many who had previously supported the monarchy now turned against it.

On 3 August, Pétion, the Mayor of Paris, went to the Legislative Assembly and demanded, on behalf of 47 out of the 48 Sections, the abolition of the monarchy. Yet the Assembly refused to depose the King and defeated a motion to put Lafayette on trial. This finally persuaded many that a rising was necessary.

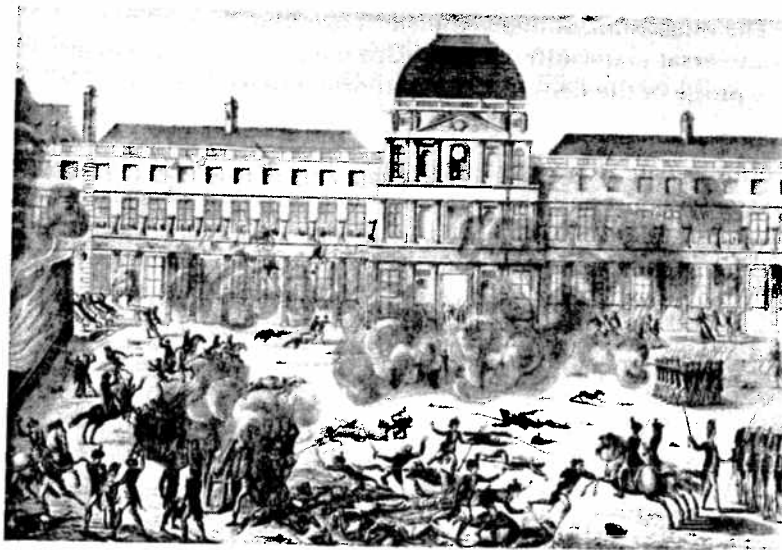
The attack on the Tuileries

On the night of 9 August *sans-culottes* took over the Hôtel de Ville, expelled the city council and set up a revolutionary Commune. Among its leaders was Hébert, who had taken part in the Cordeliers agitation the previous year and had strong links with the Sections and the *fédérés*.

The next morning – 10 August 1792, several thousand of the National Guard, which was now open to 'passive citizens', and 2000 *fédérés*, led by those from Marseille, marched on the Tuileries. The palace was defended by 3000 troops, 2000 of whom were National Guards. The others were Swiss mercenaries who were certain to resist. During the morning the King sought refuge in the Assembly to protect his family. The National Guard defending the Tuileries joined the crowd, who entered the courtyards. They believed the attack was over until the Swiss began to fire. The men from Marseille replied with grapeshot and it seemed that a violent battle was about to take place. At this point the King ordered his Swiss guards to cease fire. This left

Key date

The Tuileries palace is attacked and the French monarchy overthrown: 10 August 1792



Storming of the Tuileries Palace, 1792. What does the painting suggest about the attack on the Tuileries?

them at the mercy of the attackers: 600 Swiss were massacred. Among the attackers, 90 *fédérés* and 300 Parisians (tradesmen, craftsmen, wage-earners) had been killed or wounded. It was the bloodiest *journée* of the Revolution.

The rising was as much a rejection of the Assembly as it was of the King. The rebels invaded the Assembly and forced it to recognise the new revolutionary Commune, which had given the orders for the attack on the palace. The deputies had to hand over the King to the Commune, who imprisoned him in the Temple (see the map on page 35) – an old fortress in the north-eastern suburbs of Paris. They also had to agree to the election, by universal male suffrage, of a National Convention that was to draw up a new, democratic constitution. The Commune was now in control in Paris, though in the rest of France it was the authority of the Assembly alone that was recognised.

The proclamation of the Republic

Following the overthrow of Louis, the **constitutional monarchists** who made up about two-thirds of the deputies, did not feel safe, so they stayed away from the Assembly and went into hiding. This left the Girondins in charge, the beneficiaries of a revolution they had tried to avoid. The 300 or so deputies remaining in the Assembly appointed new ministers, including the three who had been dismissed earlier. A surprise appointment was that of Danton (see profile on page 125). He had made his career in the Cordeliers Club and the Paris Sections and was appointed Minister of Justice to please the *sans-culottes*. In its final six weeks before the National Convention replaced it, the Assembly did all that the Commune wanted. It passed several radical measures:

- Refractory priests who did not leave France were to be deported to the French colony of Guiana.

Key question

What measures did the National Assembly pass in its last six weeks?

Constitutional monarchists

Supporters of Louis who welcomed the granting of limited democratic rights to the French people.

Key term

Key date

Abolition of the monarchy and proclamation of a republic:
21–2 September 1792

- Abolition without compensation of all feudal dues unless the *seigneur* was able to produce title-deeds detailing specific rights. This was an attempt to win over the peasantry, many of whom resented the attack on the monarchy. It effectively ended the feudal system, which peasants had unsuccessfully been trying to do since the August Decrees of 1789.
- House-to-house searches ordered for arms and suspects – many were arrested.
- Divorce legalised. Registration of births, deaths and marriages became a state responsibility rather than a Church one.

After the 10 August *journée*, Louis XVI was suspended from exercising his powers. It was left for the National Convention to decide whether or not to dethrone him. The Convention met for the first time on 20 September 1792. By then there was little doubt that Louis would be deposed. Royal documents found in the Tuileries after the 10 August confirmed what was widely suspected – that the King had behaved treacherously in that he had maintained links with France's enemies. On 21–2 September 1792 the monarchy in France was abolished and a republic was proclaimed. Abolishing the monarchy was one thing, how to deal with Louis was an entirely different issue.

Key question

What were the main divisions in the newly elected Convention?

Girondins versus Jacobins: the power struggle in the Convention

In the elections to the Convention, which were held at the end of August and the beginning of September 1792, all men over 21 could vote. The results for the new 749-seat Convention were distorted by fear and intimidation. In Paris, all who had shown royalist sympathies were **disenfranchised**. Thus, all 24 members for Paris were Jacobins, republicans and supporters of the Commune. Robespierre came head of the poll in the capital. For those deputies in the Convention where it is possible to identify their political allegiance, there were about 180 Girondins and 300 Jacobins. A total of 250 deputies were uncommitted to either group and were known as **the Plain**. Forty-seven per cent of the deputies were lawyers. The proportion representing business and trade had declined to nine per cent (compared with 13 per cent in the Constituent Assembly). Only six deputies were artisans.

Until 2 June 1793, the history of the Convention was that of a struggle between the Girondins and Jacobins. The latter came to be known as the **Montagnards** or 'the Mountain' or simply the Left, because they sat on the upper benches of the Assembly to the left of the President's chair. This is a better name for them than Jacobins, as the Girondins too were members of the Jacobin Club, where both groups argued fiercely with one another. Neither group was a party in the modern sense, with an agreed programme and common discipline. People disapproved of parties, which were regarded as pursuing the selfish interests of the members rather than the common good, very much like the corporations and guilds of the *ancien régime* had done. It is,

Key terms

Disenfranchised

Stripped of the right to vote.

The Plain

The majority of deputies in the Convention who sat on the lower seats of the tiered assembly hall.

Montagnards

The Mountain – the name given to Jacobin deputies who occupied the upper seats in the tiered chamber of the National Assembly.

therefore, very difficult to say how many deputies belonged to any one group at any time.

As neither side had a majority in the Assembly, each needed to gain the support of the Plain who were also bourgeois, believed in economic liberalism and were deeply afraid of the popular movement. At first they supported the Girondins, who provided most of the ministers and dominated the majority of the Assembly's committees.

Table 4.1: The main differences between the Girondins and the Montagnards

	<i>The Girondins</i>	<i>The Montagnards (the Left)</i>
Deputies	Bourgeois	Bourgeois
Leaders	Brissot, Roland	Robespierre, Danton, Marat Couthon, Saint-Just
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believed in the Revolution and the Republic • Hated privilege • Anti-clerical • Wanted a more enlightened and humane France • Liberal economic policy, market determines wages and prices. Free market economics • Favoured federalism – more power given to the provinces • Committed to winning the war 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believed in the Revolution and the Republic • Hated privilege • Anti-clerical • Wanted a more enlightened and humane France • Tight control over wages and prices by central government. Policies of the 'maximum' • Favoured strong central government control from Paris • Committed to winning the war but willing to make greater concessions to ordinary people
Areas of support	Most of the Paris press, considerable provincial support from outside Paris. Lost some popular support because they did not fully back 10 August <i>journée</i>	Strong support among the Paris Sections, political clubs in Paris and the Paris deputies. Very popular with the <i>sans-culottes</i> and the popular movement
Beliefs and attitudes	Suspected Robespierre of wanting to create a bloody dictatorship. Were accused by the Montagnards of supporting the counter-revolution	Believed that the Girondins were seeking to attract support from the Right – former nobles and royalists – in order to remain in power. Strong government and firm policies needed to ensure survival of the Republic

Anti-clericalism
Opposition to the Catholic Church.

Key term

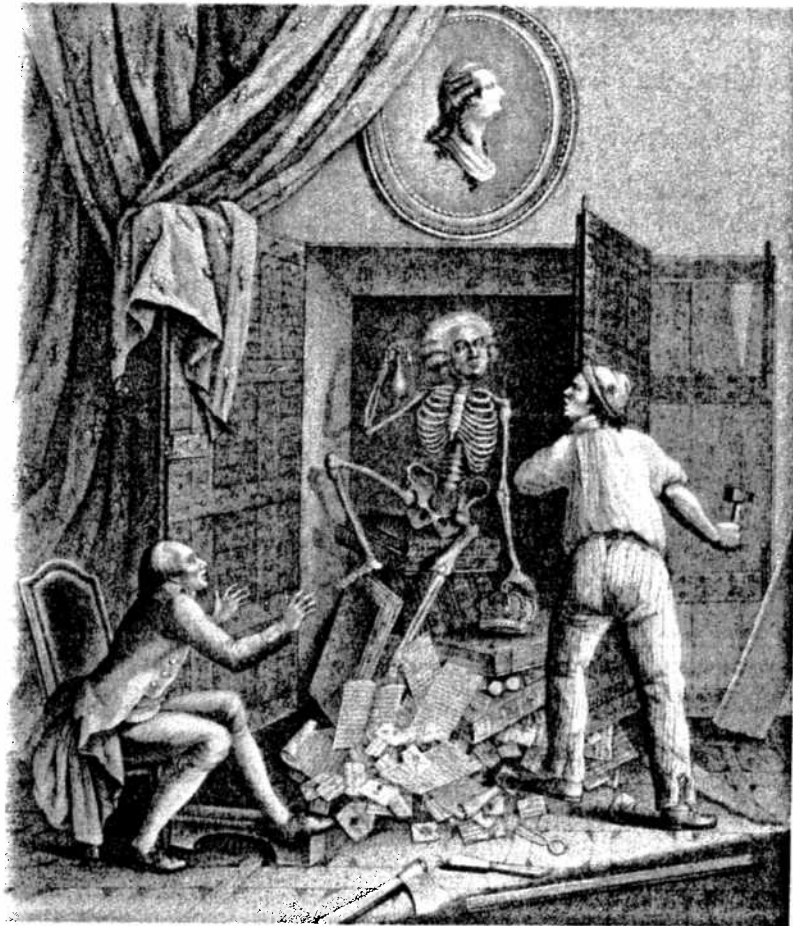
The trial of Louis XVI

The Jacobins insisted on the trial of the King, in order to establish the Republic more firmly. While Louis remained alive it might be easier for the royalists to plot a restoration. The *sans-culottes*, upon whom the Jacobins came to rely more and more, wanted the King tried and executed, as they held him responsible

Key question

What did the trial and execution of Louis XVI reveal about divisions in the Convention?

The discovery of the *armoire de fer*. Why do you think the artist has chosen to portray a skeleton in the chest?



for the bloodshed at the Tuileries on 10 August 1792. The Girondins tried to prevent a trial and, when they were unable to do this, made two attempts to save Louis' life. They firstly suggested that the King's fate should be decided by a referendum. When this was rejected and the King was found guilty and sentenced to death, they then proposed a reprieve.

Two factors sealed Louis XVI's fate. The first was the incriminating royal correspondence between Louis and the Austrian royal family revealed in the *armoire de fer* documents, which were carefully examined by a special Commission set up by the Convention. The second was Marat's proposal that a decision should be reached by *appel nominal*, 'so that traitors in this Assembly may be known'. In an Assembly of 749 deputies, no-one voted that Louis was innocent, while 693 voted that he was guilty.

When it came to the sentence 387 voted unconditionally for the death penalty, and 288 for imprisonment. The Convention then voted against a reprieve by 380 votes to 310. What the voting patterns reveal is that there was a solid bloc of moderates in the Convention who were reluctant to support the execution of the King.

Key term

Appel nominal

Each deputy was required to declare publicly his decision on the guilt or innocence of Louis XVI.

The execution of Louis XVI

Louis XVI was executed on the morning of 21 January 1793. As Saint-Just, a leading Jacobin, said

... he was executed not for what he had done but for what he was:
a menace to the Republic.

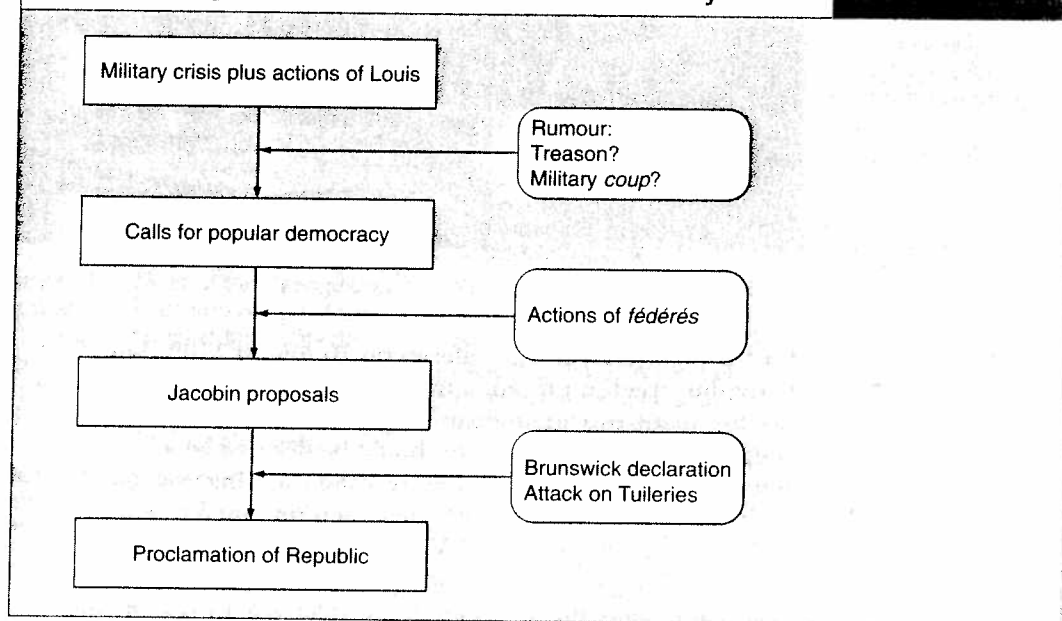
Louis XVI was executed in the *place de la revolution* in Paris: 21 January 1793

Key date

An alternative view is that Louis was executed because his actions in the period after 1789 showed that he was not to be trusted. This was to all intents and purposes confirmed by the discovery of the *armoire de fer*.

Securing the execution of Louis was the first Jacobin victory in the Convention and it left the factions more hostile to one another than ever. Although over half the Girondin leaders, including Brissot, had voted for the death penalty, they were branded as royalists and counter-revolutionaries by the Montagnards. By securing Louis' execution the Montagnards gained an ascendancy in the Convention which they rarely lost afterwards. Brissot hardly spoke there after the trial.

Summary diagram: The overthrow of the monarchy

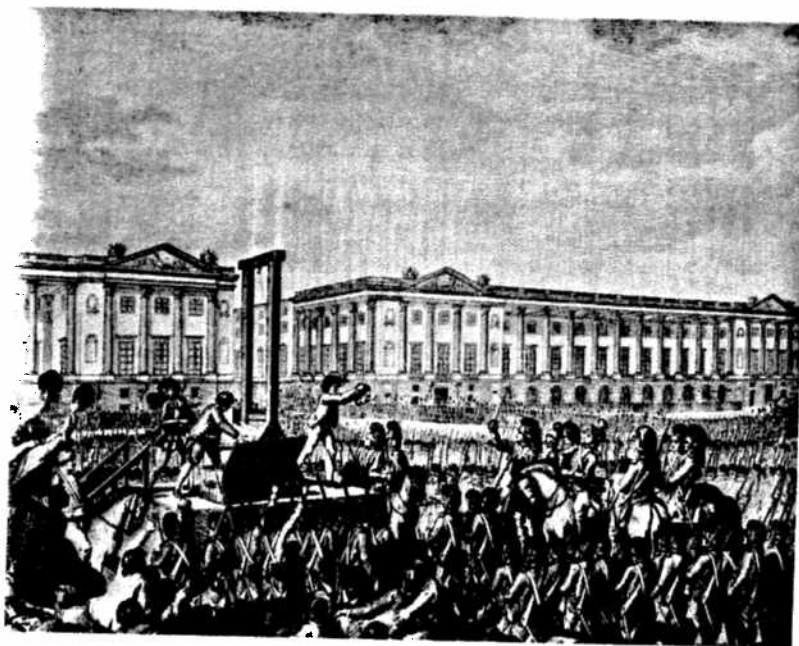


3 | The Republic at War 1792-3

In the summer of 1792 the situation of the French armies on the frontier was desperate. Lafayette had defected to the Austrians on 17 August. With a leading general deserting, who could still be trusted? Panic and fear of treachery swept the country. This was increased when the Prussians crossed the French frontier and captured Longwy. By the beginning of September, Verdun, the last major fortress on the road to Paris, was about to surrender.

Key question
How serious was the military crisis in August-September 1792?

The execution of Louis XVI in the Place de la Revolution, 21 January 1793



The French capital was under immediate threat from enemy forces, and the Revolution itself was in danger of being overthrown by foreign powers.

The September Massacres

In the worsening situation with panic and desperation setting in, the authorities appealed to the forces of nationalism and patriotism. The Commune called on all patriots to take up arms. Thousands volunteered to defend the capital and the Revolution. But, once they had left for the front, there was growing concern about the overcrowded prisons, which contained many priests and nobles as counter-revolutionary suspects. A rumour arose that these were plotting to escape, kill the helpless population and hand the city over to the Prussians. Marat, a powerful figure in the Commune, called for the conspirators to be killed. The massacre of prisoners was the first appearance of **the Terror**. It began on 2 September and continued for five days. Between 1100 and 1400 of the 2600 prisoners in Paris jails were murdered. Only a quarter were priests and nobles: the rest were common criminals. The killers were the *sans-culottes* of the Sections. The Commune made no attempt to stop them, neither did Danton, the Minister of Justice. This would have meant **mobilising** the National Guard and risking another Champ de Mars.

The massacre cast a shadow over the first meeting of the Convention. Most deputies from the provinces were shocked by the killings and rallied to the Girondins. The hatred of the Girondins for the Jacobins and their *sans-culotte* supporters was intensified. From now on, moderates and foreign opinion regarded Montagnards and *sans-culottes* as bloodthirsty savages – *buveurs de sang* (drinkers of blood).

Key terms

The Terror

The period roughly covering March 1793–August 1794 when the Jacobin government used execution and brutal repression to maintain the survival of the Republic against both its internal and external enemies.

Mobilising

Calling up part-time soldiers or national guardsmen for military service.



Contemporary print showing the September Massacres 1793. What does this print suggest about the actions carried out in early September 1792 in the prisons of Paris?

The Battle of Valmy

Just as the fortunes of war had brought about the September Massacres, they also brought an end to this first phase of the Terror. On 20 September 1792 at Valmy 52,000 French troops defeated 34,000 Prussians. This was a very significant victory. If the Prussians had won, there is little doubt that Paris would have fallen. This would probably have meant the end of the Revolution.

The new forces summoned by the decree of 12 July 1792 were very effective, particularly as they were supplemented by many volunteers, and National Guardsmen. In the main, these men were workers and traders who belonged to the *sans-culottes* rather than being the sons of the bourgeoisie. Their commitment to the revolutionary cause was likely to be considerable. Following the Prussian defeat and responding to what he had seen, the German writer Goethe noted in response to the French victory 'This day and this place open a new era in the history of the world'.

The French Republic would not be easily defeated. Brunswick, the Prussian commander-in-chief, retreated to the frontier. French armies once again took the offensive. Within a month they had occupied much of the left bank of the Rhine. In November, Dumouriez defeated the Austrians at Jemappes and occupied most of Belgium. This was the first major battle won by Republican forces.

From defence to offence

With the Republic apparently secure from external threat, the government now began to talk about expanding to reach France's **natural frontiers** – the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees – and in January 1793 it passed a decree claiming them for France. This

Key question

How did the course of the war change during the winter of 1792?

The Battle of Valmy:
20 September 1792

Key date

Natural frontiers

A barrier, such as a river, mountain range, the sea, etc., that separates countries.

Key term

Key terms

Annex

To incorporate foreign territory into a state – usually forcibly and against the will of the local people.

Decree of Fraternity

Set out the intention of the Convention to support those of any state who wished to overthrow their rulers and establish a democratic political system.

would mean **annexing** territory, which was contrary to the policy laid down by the Constituent Assembly in May 1790: 'the French nation renounces involvement in any war undertaken with the aim of making conquest'.

The change in policy was accompanied by propaganda. On 19 November 1792 the Convention issued the **Decree of Fraternity**, which promised '... to extend fraternal feelings and aid to all peoples who may wish to regain their liberty'. Some politicians were attracted to the prospect of extending the Revolution to other states. Brissot wrote 'We can only be at peace once Europe ... is blazing from end to end'. He argued that as long as France was under threat from hostile monarchs there would be little prospect of security. But, if these monarchs could be defeated, the Republic would be secure.

Avignon, which had been papal territory in France since 1273, had been annexed in 1791. Savoy (November 1792) and Nice (January 1793) were the first foreign territories to be added to the Republic. A revolutionary administration was set up in the conquered lands. French armies had to be paid for and fed at the expense of the local population. Church lands and those belonging to enemies of the new regime were confiscated. Tithes and feudal dues were abolished. These measures alienated much of the population, and confirmed Robespierre's prediction that French armies would not be welcomed abroad (see page 83).

Key question

What factors led to war between France and the First Coalition?

The War of the First Coalition

The Republican Convention posed a threat to the European monarchs with its Decree of Fraternity. The Great Powers were alarmed at the annexation of Nice and Savoy and Britain was particularly concerned at France's extension to the Rhine as this would lead to the annexation of a large part of the United Provinces as well as the whole of Austrian Netherlands (modern Belgium). William Pitt, the British Prime Minister, was determined that both of these should be kept out of French hands since they possessed good ports from which to launch any potential invasion of Britain. They were seen as central to Britain's security, not only in the English Channel but also on the routes to India (as the Dutch possessed the Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip of Africa and Ceylon). The British also disliked the French re-opening the River Scheldt to navigation (its closure since 1648 had led to the decline of the port of Antwerp as a rival to London).

The Convention unanimously declared war on Britain and Holland on 1 February 1793. The Spanish royal family, who were related to the French Bourbons, were shocked at the execution of Louis and expelled the French envoy. When it appeared that Spain was preparing to join an anti-French alliance, in March the Convention declared war on their southern neighbour. With the exception of Switzerland, Sweden and Denmark, France was at war with most of Europe. The French misunderstood the situation in Britain. They mistakenly thought that there would be a revolution there. They also thought that in war Britain would

Key date

The French Republic declares war on Britain and Holland: 1 February 1793

Key date

Key term

crumble as Prussia and Austria had done at Valmy and Jemappes. The British, for their part, thought that France was bankrupt and on the verge of civil war. Each side believed that the war would be short and easy and entered into it confidently. **The first coalition** emerged slowly between March and September 1793. Britain was the driving force binding the other powers together as there was no formal treaty. Her diplomacy persuaded a number of other countries to join the anti-French crusade.

The 1793 campaign

The campaign in 1793 began very badly for the French. An attack against Holland failed and the French commander, Dumouriez, was defeated by the Austrians at Neerwinden in March. Following his defeat he reached an agreement with the Austrian commander and planned to march on Paris, dissolve the Convention and restore the Constitution of 1791 and the monarchy. His action prompted some politicians to suspect the loyalty of the army commanders. When his army refused to follow him, Dumouriez deserted to the Austrians along with the Duc de Chartres. Chartres was the son of the Duc d'Orléans (Philippe Égalité), who later became King Louis Philippe of France (ruled 1830–48). Since the Girondins had enthusiastically backed Dumouriez, his defection was very important as it further weakened their position in the Convention and within the Paris clubs.

Meanwhile, the French lost Belgium and the left bank of the Rhine bordering their country. Once again there was fighting on French soil. Leading figures such as Danton were urging conciliation with the coalition. With the military situation deteriorating rapidly, a large rebellion broke out in the Vendée.

The role of Lazare Carnot – organiser of victory

Carnot (1753–1823) trained as a military engineer and served as a captain in the Royal army. During the Revolution he was elected firstly to the Legislative Assembly and following the overthrow of the monarchy, to the national Convention. As the military situation deteriorated, Carnot's military skills were called into use. He was sent to Bayonne, in the south, to organise the defences of the area against a possible attack from Spain. During the trial of Louis XVI, Carnot voted for the King's execution. Although his political inclination was towards the centre ground, he did lean towards the Jacobin in 1793. In the summer of 1793 he joined the Committee of Public Safety (CPS), and his military expertise was put to good use. He studied the military problems facing the Republic and presented a number of reports to the CPS. Following one such report 82 representatives were sent into the departments to speed up the conscription of 300,000 men into the army. The military front causing greatest concern to the Republic was in the north. He was sent by the CPS to lend his support to this demoralised and dispirited army. The essence of his contribution was:

The first coalition

A loose anti-French alliance created by Britain and consisting of Holland, Spain, Piedmont, Naples, Prussia, Russia, Austria and Portugal. Russia refused to commit soldiers to the coalition when Britain did not send money to support her armies.

Key term

Key question

What contribution did Carnot make to military successes in northern France?

Key dates

Austrian forces defeated at the battle of Wattignies: 16 October 1793

Start of a large-scale revolt in the Vendée: 11 March 1793

- reorganising the army
- re-establishing discipline
- leading by example in military engagements.

Before joining the Army of the North, Austrian forces were besieging Maubeuge. Following the measures suggested by Carnot, the siege was raised and enemy forces were defeated at the battle of Wattignies on 16 October 1793. During the campaign, Carnot fought alongside the generals and was in the heart of the action. He made a vital contribution to the eventual success of the campaign, and was honoured with the description ‘**organiser of victory**’.

Key question

Why did the Vendée rebel against the republican government?

The Vendée Rebellion

By the winter of 1792–3 the counter-revolution in France had virtually collapsed. It is appropriate to describe the Vendée as an ‘anti-revolution’ rather than a ‘counter-revolution’ in that it was directed more against the Revolution and its demands rather than for the restoration of the *ancien régime*. The basic causes of the uprising were the expansion of the war and the introduction of **conscription**. The government ordered a **levy** of 300,000 troops in February 1793. This triggered a massive uprising on the 11 March 1793 in four departments south of the Loire in what became known as the ‘Vendée militaire’ or simply the Vendée.

In reality, discontent in the Vendée had been present long before 1793 and the proposed conscription. Since 1789 peasants in the area had found themselves paying more in the new land tax than they had paid under the taxes of *ancien régime*. They came to dislike the revolutionary government, and with the introduction of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (see pages 58–60) this dislike turned into hatred and open hostility. The religious changes were strongly resisted in the Vendée, which was deeply attached to the Catholic Church, and there were many non-juring priests in the area.

The sale of Church lands was also unpopular, because most were bought by the bourgeoisie of the towns, who then often raised rents. Those who bought *biens* became supporters of the Revolution, which was a guarantee they could keep the land (see page 55). Those who were not successful became hostile to the government.

The peasants looked to the nobles as their natural leaders. Many of these were **monarchist**, so the rising became caught up in counter-revolution. New local officials, constitutional priests and National Guards were massacred. The situation was so serious that in May the government had to withdraw 30,000 troops from the front to deal with the rising. Yet the rebels were never a serious threat to the government in Paris. They were ill-disciplined – better at **guerrilla warfare** than set-piece battles – and unwilling to move far from their homes.

Key terms

‘Organiser of victory’

Description given to Carnot for his help in securing victory in Belgium and reversing the tide of defeat.

Conscription

Compulsory military service.

Levy

An assessment to raise an agreed number of conscripts.

Monarchist

Active supporters of the Bourbon monarchy.

Guerrilla warfare

Military action by irregular bands avoiding direct confrontation with the larger opposing forces. They did not wear uniforms in order to blend in with civilians.

Economic issues

The economic problems that the war had created added to the difficulties of the government. To pay for the war more and more *assignats* were printed, which reduced the value of those already in circulation. By February 1793, the purchasing power of the *assignat* had fallen by 50 per cent. This pushed up prices as more *assignats* were needed to buy goods. The harvest in 1792 was good but bread was scarce. Saint-Just pointed out why in a speech in November 1792: 'The farmer does not want to save paper money and for this reason he is most reluctant to sell his grain'. The results of high prices and scarcity were, as usual, widespread riots against grain stores and demands from the *sans-culottes* for price controls and **requisitioning**.

Requisitioning

Compulsory purchase by the government of supplies of food and horses paid for in *assignats* – the new paper currency.

Key term

The Republic saved

Of greater concern to the government was that the war against the allies continued to go badly in the summer of 1793. The Austrians pushed into France. The Spaniards invaded Roussillon in the south. The allies had 160,000 men on the Netherlands' border with France, with a smaller French force opposing them. If York and Coburg, the allied commanders, had joined forces and moved on Paris the French would have faced disaster. Fortunately for them, the allies did not co-ordinate their plans. Pitt ordered the Duke of York to capture Dunkirk as a naval base, so he turned west. The Austrians turned east, and the allied army broke in two. This enormous blunder saved France.

Key question

Why was France not defeated?

Summary diagram: The Republic at War 1792–3

	War	At home
1792	Military crisis Battle of Valmy	September Massacres
1793	Decree of Fraternity Annexations Declaration of war on Britain and Holland War goes badly for France	Popular discontent: Vendée Rebellion

4 | The Key Debate

Few issues rouse greater passions among historians of the Right and the Left than the role played by the *sans-culottes* in the Revolution during the period 1789–94. A central issue concerning scholars is:

Who were *sans-culottes* and to what extent did they influence the Revolution?

Albert Soboul

Soboul, a leading Marxist historian (see page 19), researched very carefully the *sans-culottes*. He suggested that they played a major role in the political struggle leading to the consolidation of the revolutionary government and the organisation of the CPS (see page 108). He argued that in social terms they can clearly be identified in a number of ways, for instance by their dress, their egalitarian social relationships and hostile attitude towards trade. According to Soboul, extreme *sans-culottes* such as Babeuf saw the Revolution in terms of a 'war between the rich and the poor'. This obvious class-based attitude was one of the features that drew Marxist historians in both France and Russia to study this group.

Alfred Cobban

Cobban, in contrast to Soboul, dismissed the notion that the *sans-culottes* were a social class. He considered that they should be defined essentially in political and not in social terms. In Cobban's view there has been an enormous concentration of attention on what was after all only a transient episode in the Revolution and which left little permanent mark on the evolution of French society. According to Cobban the *sans-culottes* were almost literally a red-herring to divert attention away from the basic rural and urban social problems of French Revolutionary history.

Gwyn A. Williams

Gwyn Williams places a different perspective on *sans-culottisme* by describing it as a type of morality. This morality had a firm social base. The heart and core of *sans-culotterie* were the artisans, tradesmen and journeymen, the further one moves from this base the more honorary *sans-culottes* become. Its embodiment was Hébert's *Le Père Duchesne* (see page 123). By 1793-4 the movement, however primitive and precarious, was recognisably a political movement, organised through popular societies and Section assemblies. Their point of entry into politics was the first war crisis of 1792 and the proclamation of *La Patrie en Danger*. Both the *sans-culottes* and Jacobins were self-conscious minorities compelling the people to be free. In this sense, according to Williams, there is a direct line from Robespierre's Despotism of Liberty to Marx's Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Some key books in the debate

Richard Cobb, *The Peoples' Armies* (Yale, 1987).

Richard Cobb, *The Police and the People* (Oxford University Press, 1970).

Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretations of the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1964).

Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution 1793-4* (Oxford University Press, 1964).

Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (Arnold, 1968).
